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TO THE
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GRADUATES

OF

St. John's College

Class of 1905

MR. JAMES F. SHEA,

¹¹
Class of '81

LAFAYETTE SQUARE OPERA HOUSE,
WASHINGTON, D. C.

June 16, 1905

BY TRANSFER

JUN 8 1972

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YOUNG gentlemen of the graduating class. The occasion which brings us together this evening—the annual commencement exercises of St. John's College—in which you bear such a conspicuous part, constitutes an event in your lives, the importance and significance of which will, no doubt, be better appreciated by you in years to come than at present. Standing on the threshold of a new experience, surrounded by admiring friends and relatives, eager and anxious for the larger life that now opens out before you, you may indeed be excused if any serious thoughts of the future are lost in the joy and happiness which are rightly yours to-night; and yet, as you pass from under the care of the Christian Brothers, to be, certainly to a greater extent than heretofore, your own masters, the question naturally propounds itself to each one of you—How shall I succeed in life? What methods shall I adopt, what course shall I pursue to attain this end?

Coming as you do from a college which seeks to impart a practical education which shall be most useful and best suited for the activities of every day life, it is not my purpose to attempt to fill your minds with lofty and ambitious ideas of fame and glory, but rather to make a few suggestions which may be of service to you in the ordinary vocations of life for which the vast majority of us are destined and best suited. Every man has a distinct mission in this world ; every man has

a duty to perform to society, one in one direction, another in another direction and so on, and the performance of this duty, the completion of this mission in such a manner that it shall tend to the greater honor and glory of God, the benefit and betterment of our fellowmen and the salvation of our own souls, is what constitutes the success of a life work. It is not a matter of position, wealth or power, but simply what we are in the sight of God, that determines this all-important question.

At the very outset of your careers, my young friends, I beg of you to dismiss from your minds the idea, so prevalent amongst young men, that you will drift with the tide until something eventually turns up which will place you on the road to fame and fortune ; this is an illusion you will do well to dispell at once, because success comes not as a mere caprice of fortune, but as the result of steady, continuous and well-directed effort and work. I would advise you to consider carefully and well the avocation in life for which by taste, inclination, talents and environment, you appear to be best suited; this is a most important step and upon its proper direction may depend the whole course of your careers. Many of you doubtless will find that in the beginning, your minds are not made up as to what particular course you are to follow—to such I would say, embrace the best opportunity that presents itself ; enter upon your work with energy and determina-

tion, and in due course of time your proper calling will manifest itself ; particularly do I advise you not to turn aside from the calling for which you appear to be best fitted simply because it does not appear high enough to suit your, or your parents ambitions, and whilst I do not wish to say anything to discourage a reasonable ambition, I would remind you that we all cannot fill the so-called higher station of life ; we cannot all be professional men, and besides the humbler positions in life bring their opportunities if we but make the proper use of them ; after all, honest manhood dignifies the humblest calling and an industrious farmer or mechanic is a far more useful member of society than an indifferent lawyer or doctor ; and in addition the humbler stations of life bring with them a compensation in the way of peace, contentment, and happiness which are frequently unknown to those who occupy the dizzy and perilous heights of greatness and power.

Having once entered upon an occupation bring to it thoroughness and perseverance of purpose, attention to detail and a determination to master it—these are the great essentials to success in every line of human endeavor—if you have a position in an office or a business house or whatever it may be do not be content to drift along like a machine, merely doing what you are told—merely performing your duties in a perfunctory sort of way so that you may draw your salary on pay day; do not watch the clock too closely

when near the closing hour, or imagine that you do yourself an injustice if you occasionally work overtime—on the contrary study the requirements of your position—understand its details, strive to improve them, and in a short while it will be found that you are fitted for large responsibilities. This is the way to get on in the world—dismiss from your minds day dreams about the future, concentrate your energies upon the duties of the present, and thus rise with each new experience upon the stepping stones of success. You should also guard yourselves against a weakness common to a large part of humanity and which is responsible for the greater number of failures in life—that of being easily discouraged ; we all must expect a certain amount of losses, of failures, a certain amount of obstacles that have to be overcome and if we but meet them in the right and manly way they will be the means of our becoming better and stronger men as the lives of so many men who have made their mark in this world will testify, whose early failures and setbacks were really the means by which they afterwards rose to success and greatness. Another very important matter which must not be overlooked is the care of your health ; in the stress and struggle of every day life good health and a good constitution are most necessary factors, and it not infrequently happens that men give too much time and energy to their affairs with the result that they break down prematurely and are afterwards compelled to spend gen-

erously of their time and money in the difficult task of regaining lost health. The lesson you are to draw from this is that the major portion of your time is to be devoted to the duties of your station, a certain amount should also be reserved for leisure and recreation; the effect of this rule will not only tend to preserve your health and strength, but also to render your work more pleasant and enjoyable.

You are certainly fortunate, my young friends, in the training you have thus far received ; you go forth from this institution of learning well equipped for a future which appears full of promise for those who would make it worth while ; full of opportunity for those who work with a will and whose ideas are upward and onward ; in this day and generation science and invention have brought the peoples of the earth closely together—before breakfast time tomorrow morning we may read the main happenings of today throughout the world—and to a greater extent than ever before the eyes of the world are centered upon this country—the spirit of liberty is spreading, and our influence is being felt in other lands—and we, too, at home, have also important problems of our own to solve ; the relations of Capital and Labor, the too great concentration of power and wealth, the evils of corrupt politics and many other social and economic problems which will require calm, patient, and intelligent judgment to properly settle. I congratulate you on the

success which has attended your scholastic labors, and on your being so well fitted for the duties and responsibilities of American citizenship which you are soon to assume—to assist in solving in an intelligent and patriotic manner the different problems which this age like every other age will have presented to it ; to assist in maintaining the glorious record of our country, so that we may, even to a greater extent than heretofore exercise an influence for good amongst the nations of the earth.

You have been trained by the disciples of De LaSalle, by men who have given up home and kindred and all that the world holds dearest to devote themselves to the cause of religious and practical education—to the end that you may be properly prepared for your life work ; and, tonight your teachers, and your many friends who are gathered here, bid you Godspeed, their hopes and best wishes will follow you in the new and larger life which lies before you ; go forth, then, with courage and determination, resolved that no matter what the future may have in store for you, through sunshine or sorrow, success or disappointment you will adhere firmly to the teachings of our holy religion without which you can have no real success ; that you will do your duty as you see and understand it ; that you will make the best of your opportunities, and live so as to be useful and respected members of your community, and honor to your Alma Mater, and a credit to yourselves.

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